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Puerto Rico Gov. Ricardo Rosselló Resigns

Amid civil unrest and grounds for impeachment

Giovanna Garofalo & Yennifer Álvarez, The Weekly Journal Jul 24, 2019 Updated Jul 30, 2019

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(Screenshot Facebook)





Secretary of Justice: "I Have No Interest in Being Governor"

Wanda Vázquez is the next in line to be governor after Gov. Ricardo Rosselló resignation past Wednesday



Gov. Rosselló to Designate Pierluisi as Secretary of State

Senate president reportedly against nomination

Puerto Rico Gov. Ricardo Rosselló officially announced his resignation, 11 days after a leaked chat between his top Cabinet officials, and members of the private sector stirred controversy over corruption allegations and ethical implications.

Rosselló has submitted his resignation effective August 2, 2019 at 5:00 p.m.

Gov. Rosselló said his successor for the moment would be the secretary of Justice, Wanda Vázquez-García. Ms. Vázquez-García was next in line under the territory's Constitution after the secretary of State, Luis Rivera Marín, who would have succeeded as governor, resigned last week because he was in the chat scandal.

"Despite having the mandate of the people who democratically elected me, today I recognize that continuing in this position represents a difficulty for the success achieved to last. That is why today I announce that I have decided to resign from the position of governor, effective on Friday, August 2, 2019, at 5:00 p.m.," the governor said in a statement posted online late Wednesday, July 24, 2019.



Wanda Vázquez Reacts to Governor's Resignation

Affirms she is ready to assume leadership

"During these days I will be attending pending issues that make possible an orderly transition. At that time I will complete my mandate and give way to the succession process established by our Constitution to swear to whom at that time it is appropriate to complete the project planned for this four-year period," Rosselló added.

"In the past few days my love for Puerto Rico has been questioned. Being governor is an honor that involves sacrifice and work. I have dedicated my best years to this great project. Unlike past governments that did not admit failures, when I made mistakes, I accepted and amended them. To make mistakes is human, and I am as human as you. On many occasions, what we express as a joke or under courage does not define us as people. The achievements made during the past 30 months reveal our genuine commitment to Puerto Rico. Nothing can erase that truth," Rosselló pointed out.

Rosselló added "today, on the eve of the celebration of our Constitution, I honor it with my actions. The same Constitution that allowed me to be elected on November 2016. The same Constitution that allowed the free expression of the People and the same Constitution that will allow an orderly transition in accordance with its provisions. Provisions that were conceived by great Puerto Ricans who in 1952 configured a modern, progressive, and wise Constitution. But as it is celebrated, I call to defend and preserve it for being the legal vehicle by virtue of which we organize ourselves politically."



(Courtesy La Fortaleza)

"The person who assumes the responsibility of the office that I have had the honor and privilege of occupying will need the People of Puerto Rico and support of those who work tirelessly for our land. I trust that Puerto Rico will remain united and forward as it always has," Rosselló said.

"I hope that this decision will serve as a call for the

reconciliation that we need so much to move forward with Puerto Rico as the north," he added.



With Rosselló's resignation, this means that Justice Secretary Wanda Vázquez will assume his responsibilities.

The governor made the announcement after the Puerto Rico House of Representatives start the self-convened process to set forth the impeachment.

Earlier, a report by a team of jurists assigned by the House of Representatives identified the chat contained grounds for impeachment.

The committee was comprised of Francisco Reyes Caparrós, Luis Enrique González, and José Enrique Colón Santana.

The report concluded that Rosselló may have incurred in four felonies and one misdemeanor involving "moral depravity."

The three possible felonies are violations to Articles 252, 264(b), and 263 of the Penal Code, as well as Article 4.2(b) of the Puerto Rico Government Ethics Act. The

misdemeanor concerns Article 4.2(k) of the Ethics Act also.

However, the content of the report could be referred to the Department of Justice because it has the legal responsibility for any criminal procedure.

"Impeachment does not involve a criminal assessment but the elements of a possible crime," said Colón Santana.

The attorney also pointed out that if the House or the Senate were to determine that there is no basis for the political trial, "any person can be subject to subsequent accusations," referring to criminal forums.

Before the New Progressive Party analyzed the report in a meeting held in House Speaker Carlos "Johnny" Méndez's office, the Popular Democratic Party offered a press conference in which they urged Méndez to schedule a meeting with all representatives to begin the impeachment process.

Around 4 p.m. on July 24, Méndez held a press conference on the Capitol, in which he reaffirmed that the House would continue to proceed with its impeachment process, as he urged Rosselló to make "the best decision for the people of Puerto Rico."

At that same time, the governor was expected to convene with the heads of government instrumentalities, but reportedly canceled the meeting over safety concerns.

However, rumors begun circling social media Tuesday night and media and major news sources indicated that the governor would resign before Thursday.

Some newspaper editors risk announcing that the event

would occur before noon today, or that he had already introduced his resignation and was underway to leave the island.

Nevertheless, hours prior to the governor's announcement, the Secretary of Public Affairs, Anthony Maceira had denounced these rumors as unfounded and affirmed that Rosselló had neither resigned nor departed.

"The governor Ricardo Rosselló Nevares has not resigned and he remains in Puerto Rico. As he said yesterday (Tuesday), he is in a process of reflection and listening to the people. Whichever the decision he might take, he will communicate officially, as per usual," Maceira said.

"Due to the environment of speculation, to date, there are incorrect rumors been spread, even on some news outlets. We reiterate that any official communication will be shared with the media," he added.

For the past 12 days, thousands of Puerto Ricans have held daily protests against the governor.

While most of these have been centered on La Fortaleza and Cristo streets in Old San Juan—in front of the governor's mansion—other sectors in the metropolitan area and other municipalities as Caguas, Bayamón, Barranquitas, among others, have expressed their dissatisfaction with rallies and demonstrations.

On both July 17 and July 22, famous Puerto Rican artists as Ricky Martin, Bad Bunny and Residente joined the people's call and urged their followers to protest.

In addition to locals, several U.S. officials had chimed in and pleaded for Rosselló to give in, including Rep. Raúl Grijalva (D- Ariz.), the chair of the Natural Resource

Committee that oversees Puerto Rico; Sen. Marco Rubio (R-FL), Democratic presidential candidate Tulsi Gabbard—who visited the island—and others.

The events that have transpired for the past two weeks have garnered international attention.

In addition, Puerto Ricans living or traveling abroad had orchestrated protests of their own, in destinations like Spain, New York City, Florida, San Francisco, Mexico, and more.

Although the arrests of former secretary of Education, Julia Keleher and former head of the Health Services Administration (ASES by its Spanish acronym), Ángela Ávila on July 10 over wire fraud and money laundering accusations drew outrage, the leaked Telegram chat garnered public backlash and drove the masses to protest.

With some exceptions, contrary to most long-standing protests in recent history—such as demonstrations against increased tuition fees in the University of Puerto Rico and other austerity measures—these demonstrations have been attended by people of all ages.

Most of the demonstrators have been young adults, Gen Y (Millennials) and Gen Z; however, children and older adults made their voices heard as well.

Protesters caught worldwide attention over their creativity—apart from marching down the streets, some demonstrators rode on horses, jet skis, bikes, motorcycles, and others. Also, some protested underwater or while skydiving, and others partook in yoga, protest art, pot-banging, and more.

Most recently, some protesters had been calling for truck drivers to go on a strike in order to pressure the governor into resigning.

While most demonstrations have been peaceful, some ended with confrontations between demonstrators and the police force.

Around 11 p.m. on the general strike last Monday, police released tear gas once again, but one of the cans impacted a parked car and set it ablaze.

Although protesters were initially blamed for setting the car on fire, video evidence circled on social media shortly thereafter and firemen found the can inside the vehicle. As a result, Police Commissioner Henry Escalera assumed responsibility.

Due to the Telegram chat scandal, all public officials who were in the chat, save for Maceira, resigned from their positions. In addition, Elías Sánchez ended his contract with Wolf Popper, a San Juan-based firm, media reported.

Sánchez formerly worked as Rosselló's campaign director in 2016 and as his representative before the Financial Oversight & Management Board (FOMB) designated by the U.S. Congress under the Puerto Rico Oversight, Management & Economic Stability Act (Promesa).

Amid the controversy, it was alleged that lobbied for his clients to receive preferential treatment in government



Protests Grow as Gov. Rosselló Reiterates he's Staying in Office

Although the governor announced he won't seek reelection and stepped down as head of the pro-statehood party, for protesters, his actions are not enough

contracts. This allegedly includes Puma Energy, an oil company, which got the contract to distribute fuel to the P.R. Electric Power Authority (PREPA).

Now that the governor officially resigned, it is unclear whether the people will continue with their demonstrations against public corruption, given that the main goal was for Rosselló to either step down voluntarily or through impeachment.

While some have only echoed the now-famous "Ricky, renuncia" (Ricky, resign), others have commented on social media that they will not stop protesting until public corruption is properly tackled.



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